

Real-time Assessment with Poll Everywhere

Stand around with a group of teens for any given length of time, and it won't be long before you see one of them brandish a cell phone and begin texting a friend. Text messaging has become a primary communication tool among many students we teach, and it's also become a popular tool for providing information to and capturing responses from large groups of people. We have recently seen presidential candidates sending out text message updates to their constituency, CNN provide text message coverage of the Beijing Olympics, and shows like *American Idol* receive millions of text messages from voters everywhere. What if we could harness the power of this communication method within our classrooms?

INTRODUCING POLL EVERYWHERE

Poll Everywhere (<http://www.polleverywhere.com>) is a service that allows groups of individuals to vote within user-generated polls using a mobile phone's text messaging capability** or a simple web form. This system has quickly become a part of major presentations given by Microsoft, Cisco, MIT and more because of its ability to capture an audience's thoughts and understandings at a given moment in time. This reason alone makes *Poll Everywhere* a powerful classroom tool.

But the people at *Poll Everywhere* have thought carefully about their service and see many more benefits to using a service like this within classrooms. These include but are not limited to:

- increasing classroom participation and attentiveness;
- encouraging risk-taking with anonymous student responses;
- eliciting diverse opinions when there isn't a correct answer;
- gauging student comprehension of material immediately;
- grabbing students with thought-provoking opening questions; and
- assessing last night's reading with a quick quiz



Now, *Poll Everywhere* is offering their service free of charge to classes of up to 30 students. This will allow any teacher to create multiple polls for classroom use. Each poll can only have 30 responses, but the results can be emptied and the poll reused. For larger groups, there are fees involved.

GETTING STARTED

Before signing up, you may first wish to learn a bit more about *Poll Everywhere*. On their website, you can click the *Play Demo button* to better understand how the service works.

Then it's time to sign up. It's simple. Click on the *Signup for Free* button on the main page. You will be asked to fill out a simple web form, and within 30 seconds, you will be ready to begin setting up your polls.

CREATING YOUR FIRST POLL

Once you have created your account and are logged in, it's time to create your first poll. Click on the *My Polls* link, and you will be taken into the poll editor. From here, you have the option to create two types of polls. The first is a multiple-choice poll, and the second is a free text poll for open-ended responses. We'll start here with a multiple-choice poll. Type your question into the first box with your answers following. If you want, you can reorganize your answers by dragging them around using the *Drag Me* option.

Once you are finished with your questions, look at the different options on the right side of the screen. You can limit responders to only one vote, and you can provide them with a custom thank you message after voting. This thank you message will be sent back to the responder via text message. You may choose not to use this feature. Also, you can choose to allow responders to vote using a text message and/or a web form found at <http://www.poll4.com>. This Web based option is a great benefit for students who don't have access to a phone or text messaging services.

Once you have setup your question and options, be sure to click your *Save new poll* button.

POLLING STUDENTS

Upon saving your poll, you will be taken to your poll question's page. At this point, you can turn the poll on by clicking the *Open Poll* option on the right of the page. Doing this will provide your class with instructions on how to vote. Basically, each response has a number like 33176. For a student to vote, they will need to text this number to the number 99503. As votes come in, the graph adjusts in real time. If you want to hide your results until all votes are in, click on the button that says *Table (Hide results)* located under the graph. Click it again to show your results at the end. The open ended voting method uses a similar technique.

PRESENTING YOUR POLL TO STUDENTS

There are numerous ways to present your poll to students. How you choose to do so can easily match

up to your preferred teaching style. For example, you could log into your *Poll Everywhere* account, open your poll question and click the *Fullscreen* link under your graph. This will cause your poll to fully cover your screen. You might also choose to put your polls into a slide presentation, Web site, blog or wiki. From your question's page, you can download *PowerPoint* slides or get the embed code and instructions for putting your poll into the Web based presentation service, 280 Slides or elsewhere.

FINISHING UP A POLL

When you are finished using a poll, you will want to go back to your poll's question page and close the poll to stop the voting process. Then you can analyze your results online or you can click on a link to download your results as an *Excel* spreadsheet. Finally, with your results in hand, you can delete the question or clear the results out so that you are ready for your next group if you will be giving this poll question multiple times.

CONCLUSION

In many schools, tools and services like mobile phones, iPods, blogs and *YouTube* are banned for student use. They have deemed useless distractions that often bring out the worst in our students. We can turn this around. We can provide students with meaning and authentic tasks that will engage them and develop their abilities to think on their feet, connect with global peers and solve real-world problems using the devices with which they are most familiar. At the same time, we can ramp up our classrooms with creative tools and techniques that bring rigor and authenticity into our schools.

QUESTIONS

Contact brian@novemberlearning.com.

***Note: We do realize that text messaging is not an option for every school and every student. Before going further it is important to note that text messaging is a service that must be purchased from a mobile provider. While many students do already subscribe to unlimited texting services, many do not. The service discussed below does offer options for students who do not use or have text messaging services.*